2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

directly it shows signs of dying. I was told that they will follow a sick donkey for miles, circling lazily in the air and greedily awaiting the moment when the animal will totter to its knees and slowly expire. 136 826

A patriarchal-looking Arab in a brown silk *abbas* came towards us and greeted the Khan Sahib with affection. He told us that he belonged to the retinue of the Sheikh Raschid, who was camping in the hills nearby. Apparently the sheikh was on a hunting expedition and had shot several gazelle and *houbari*, the lesser bustard. We declined his invitation to take coffee with the sheikh, as this would have meant a delay of at least an hour, and time was pressing; so he gave us very exact instructions for finding the road to Mahrid. This meant crossing a wadhi, where the ground was still soggy and uncertain for heavy vehicles, but with luck and good driving we crossed it without mishap. A grubby Arab boy appeared from behind a neam tree and, jumping on our running board, insisted on showing us the way; we did not begrudge him the lift and, as it transpired, he really was helpful. 000

The way meandered through a field of perfumed clover, a small-leaved variety with tiny yellow flowers. The scent was reminiscent of mimosa and was so strong as to be almost overwhelming. Hundreds of bees, attracted by the smell, filled the still air with their murmuring. The Arabs collect large quantities of honey from this district, and it is all made from the scented clover-pollen. The mountains now loomed titanically above us, grim and lowering, and ten miles to the west we could see the spires and towers of Ras-al-Khaimah reflected in the clear blue waters of the creek. [137] [222]

At the foot of the hills the softer green of the grass was shaded by dark avenues of neam trees, plantations of date palms, and the summer gardens of the wealthier residents. We had eight miles to go before we reached Mahrid, and it was already noon. We felt hungry and thirsty, and longed for the cool veranda of the Khan Sahib's house, with prospects of sherbet, *halowa* and cheese. At that moment—such is the perversity of life—our truck gave a convulsive cough and refused to budge further. A quick inspection by our driver revealed that we had run out of petrol. [529] [262]

No course was open to us other than to alight from the overheated vehicle, light pipes or cigarettes, and sit down to talk the situation over. We had a faint inkling of how the Army at Tobruk and Marble Arch must have felt in a similar predicament, only with Messerschmitts and Junkers zooming overhead, and how they

‡ [Near Mahrid -- Analyst]

'*roh, zitat*', sent them scampering away. Presently a slave brought us dishes of *halowa*, which is made of atta flour, wild honey and ghee butter; dates swimming in honey and ginger syrup, and slices of cheese made from goats' milk.

While we regaled ourselves, the coxswain went out in a dhow to inspect the emergency alighting area, to make sure that the mooring buoys were clean and free of barnacles, and to inspect the chains and tackle. In 1932, before the present alighting area at Dubai had been chosen, it was intended to make a flying-boat base at Ras-al-Khaimah, but the sheikh refused to give his consent. He was offered a generous rental for the area, with an additional landing fee for each aircraft, while members of the Indian community, who foresaw great possibilities in the project, promised him that they would develop the town into a second Karachi if he would accept the British offer. Yet the sheikh persisted in his refusal, partly because he was afraid of foreign domination and of losing some of his independence, and partly because the neighbouring sheikhs (notably Sultan bin Saqr, of Sharjah, father of the present ruler) had dissuaded him. If he permitted the British to build a fort and a flying-boat base there, they argued, he would be liable to attack from Bedouin tribesmen. This was in the days when tribal wars were rife, and the roaming Bedouins attacked and plundered at the slightest provocation. Even the Corporation's premises at Sharjah were subjected to attack and siege on one occasion. Thus the establishment of a new British fort at Ras-al-Khaimah would give the Bedouins a fresh incentive for causing trouble.

Ras-al-Khaimah lost the opportunity of becoming an important air base and a flourishing port, for the Indians would have built piers and made a harbour for coastal steamers. The following year negotiations were opened between the Government of India (on behalf of the Corporation) and the sheikhs of Sharjah and Dubai, and agreements were signed which resulted in the present land and sea bases being built. The Khan Sahib informed me that the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah, having regretted his short-sighted policy and feeling that he had been double-crossed by Sharjah and Dubai, was now anxious for the British Government to build a flying-boat and land-plane base on his territory. This is most unlikely to happen, however, since, apart from the remoteness of the site, the shallowness of the water and its unsuitability for both flying-boats and ocean-going craft, it has no road communications fit for motor

006 and pointed out that if we were based there we should have no need of motor-cars. The Khan Sahib tactfully hedged him off this subject, since he realized that I had no desire to commit myself to any statement which the sheikh might construe as an official decision.

622 [471] 245 439 We were on safe ground when we asked him about the date plantations, for the sheikh is one of the largest plantation owners in Oman, and a considerable part of his income is derived from the sale of dates. It appeared that the crop was doing excellently this year, but, owing to the war and the shortage of transport, the demand from foreign countries had dropped considerably. He was, therefore, exporting greater quantities to India and Egypt, although a fair amount was being shipped to South Africa and America. When we told him that people in England had seen very few dates during the war, and that the few which were on sale were rationed, he was very sympathetic. He knew little about English food and, being an Arab, could scarcely imagine how a household could exist without dates.

● [262]

578 Praise Allah, he said, they had experienced no drought or plague of insects this year, but they had suffered from raids from the hills. The cursed Shi'hou tribesmen (might they die of plague in their filthy caves!) had been attacking and robbing his labourers, so that they were afraid to enter the plantations except in groups, and he had been obliged to employ armed guards to keep them off. That very morning, he explained, he intended to hold a conference of his nobles to plan a campaign of defence against these marauders. He intended to drive them back into their mountains and inflict such heavy punishment that they would not venture into the plains again for many months. If only he had an aeroplane, he said wryly, he would know how to deal with the Shi'hou! 'Like you do in Afghanistan,' he added with a chuckle.

622 The sheikh, who was a fine-looking old man with a patriarchal, weather-beaten face, had a reputation for being one of the most fearless fighters in Oman, and his feud with Sharjah of ten years ago was still talked about in the desert. Hanging on the wall was a long ceremonial sword, with a chased gold handle; it is said that he had swept off the heads of three men with its blade with a single sweep. He had a face of great power, a tight-lipped mouth, a large hooked nose, and keen grey eyes under shaggy eyebrows. Although few of us understood his language, we all fell under the spell of his strong personality. He was kindly and courteous, but

[1 The Sheikh of Ras-al-Kalmah -- Analyst]

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

she pleaded that no man had been near her that night. On being questioned, she admitted that she had stopped to gather some *fagar* on the way home, darkness had fallen and she had lost her way. She had spent the night most respectably, sleeping under a neam tree. (To understand this incident, it should be explained that the *fagar* is a kind of edible fungus, much liked by the Arabs, and that in shape it curiously resembles the phallus.)

The trackers employed by the Sheikh of Sharjah were reputed to be the cleverest in Arabia. That afternoon I had gone for a walk to the Sheikh's Wells, a delightful spot about two miles from the fort, whence we obtained our water supply. The area is covered with flower and vegetable gardens, and guarded by one of the round stone watch-towers which one finds on the outskirts of most Arab towns. The Sheikh and his Ministers arrived in a smart Hudson automobile, followed by the Khan Bahadur, Abdur bin Razzak, in his sedan. They were met by two trackers on camels, and proceeded to hold a conference.

Fifteen minutes later the trackers set off for the hospital, picked up the tracks of the raiders, and were soon galloping off in the desert at a smart pace in the direction of Baraimi. This is a small market town in the middle of a trackless desert. The territory is not claimed by any sheikh, although several have tried to possess it. For hundreds of years it has remained neutral ground, and its famous date plantations represent the only example of co-operation among the tribes, for each has a share in the crop. Baraimi is not only a centre for the slave trade, but is a refuge for criminals.

We heard later that the raiders had been traced to Dhaid, but that the trackers had been unable to arrest them. They were in hiding with about a hundred other brigands, and there are limits to the courage of a tracker. Compensation for the thefts was paid to the R.A.F. authorities, and it was a rather curious fact that, several months later, sheets and blankets, bearing the R.A.F. tabs, were found in local houses.

Desert raiders are usually the 'bad boys' of their tribe, and their conduct does not always reflect the character of the tribe as a whole. Some tribes pride themselves on their honesty and deal very sternly with offenders. If a tribesman of the Beni Qitab is caught in the act of stealing or raiding, the Sheikh Mahomed, the patriarch who rules this tribe, will make himself personally responsible for the thief's apprehension and punishment. This may take the form of amputating the right arm, branding, or the more barbarous punish-

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

none. Our most amusing find was that of a *dhabbi*, a small yellow lizard with a spatulate tail, which it uses as a spade for burrowing into the sand; it also uses this tail as a paddle and can travel quite fast by this means. Various species of reptiles are found in this region, including a large grey lizard, measuring almost four feet at full growth, the flesh of which is edible. Among snakes there is the common adder and a species of krait, smaller than the Indian genus, but highly poisonous. We saw none of these on this journey, however.

We returned to our cars and were about fifteen miles beyond Umm-al-Quwain and in sight of the plantations of Falaj-al-'Ali when we came upon the camp of the Anti-Locust Commission. We hoped to see Joyce, but he was away in the desert towards Shinas, and we spoke instead to his foreman, an Indian entymologist from Bombay. He told us that they had completed their work of collecting and checking specimens in the area, and were now laying traps and arsenical baits. They boasted that they would destroy at least ninety-five per cent of the larvæ in this district, which I found hard to believe. The foreman mentioned that his party would remain in the desert for twenty-one days and had just enough rations for that period.

The members of the Commission, who are all Indians except Captain Joyce, receive about four rupees a day in addition to their rations and equipment. When they penetrate far into the interior guides and guards are provided by the sheikhs of the locality, at suitable remuneration. These guides will never enter the territory of another tribe, so that fresh arrangements have to be made for each tribal area. The party seldom suffered from molestation, partly because Captain Joyce invariably goes ahead of them and makes arrangements with the tribes for their safety, but they are not popular with the Bedouins; this is partly because they do not trust foreigners, even Indians, and partly because they do not believe they are hunting for locusts. Even Sheikh Mahommed, who is a highly intelligent man, told me that he suspected they were secretly searching for minerals or making maps. From the propertied sheikhs, on the other hand, the Commission receives every assistance, as they are anxious to keep the pests away from their crops. The Bedouins, who do no work and grow nothing but a little millet or tobacco, are not interested in locust suppression; in fact, locusts form a part of their diet.

Falaj-al-'Ali lay five miles beyond the camp, but we skirted the

gives nitrogenous value to the soil. The subterranean channel rises to the surface in the middle of the plantation, where it is collected in a large cement reservoir; from this source the water, carefully controlled in volume, is conveyed by pipes and runnels into narrow ducts constructed at right-angles to the paths. Palm trees are very thirsty and require plenty of water in the hot weather.

A single *Askhari* guarded the plantation, which was noisy with the chatter of brilliantly-plumed birds; for our amusement he climbed a tall palm with the agility of a monkey, using a rope-sling as a support, and dexterously cut a bunch of male flowers for our inspection. The flowers, which have a sickly sweet smell, are tightly packed in a tough protective sheath; these sheaths are sold, when ripe, and used to pollinate the female palms. They are also edible, being very palatable when boiled and eaten with butter sauce. When, a few months later, I passed through Djaidh, the green dates were already forming, and labourers were high in the trees, tying veils of muslin around them to protect them from insects. The dates which are intended for export are gathered when they are light brown, that is, half-ripe, and are often packed with the stalk attached. The Arabs usually prefer them fully ripe, when the colour is dark brown; over-ripe dates are used for the manufacture of syrup which, when crystallized, makes a good brown sugar. Hives are often kept in the vicinity of the plantations and the air was full of their buzzing as we passed through the glades.

Before we reached the encampment we passed the ruins of an old fort. Nothing but the outer shell remained and the gateway had long since lost its magnificent doors; the walls were of rose-pink clay and mortar, and the crumbling tower was crenellated like the ramparts of a mediæval French castle. Sheikh Hamid told us that the fort originally belonged to his grandfather, Sheikh of Kalba, who at one time included Djaidh among his possessions; but a succession of tribal wars had decreased the influence of the Kalba clan and Djaidh had degenerated into neutral ground.

The road to the encampment was a mere body-wide track through tall grass, so high in places that we could not see ahead. Presently two little Arab boys, leading an emaciated bull, greeted us as the truck emerged from this forest and entered a wide, muddy river bed. Here we saw the first of the wells. A gang of labourers was busily letting down baskets into the main channel, while the tribesmen looked on. The headman, a fine-looking old Arab

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travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs. Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu* might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal, camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys, wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco, which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.

63:Simmons et al G-5 (1941-1951) 1954
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244 and various vegetables are cultivated in the inland valleys. Cows, goats and other live-
233 361 stock are raised in the towns and the villages, but camels, goats and sheep are the mainstay of the Bedouin.

816 Ocher is mined on the offshore island of
471 Bu Musa, but no other mineral deposits of
135 commercial value are known to exist. The Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) Ltd., a subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company, holds concessions for the exploitation of the oil reserves of Trucial Oman, and is conducting exploratory operations in the area. The discovery of oil would undoubtedly have a revolutionary effect upon the economy and the standards of living of the people.

361 A large majority of the inhabitants dwell in the headquarters towns of the different sheikhdoms or in adjacent fishing or agricultural villages. Most of the towns are compact, with narrow, crooked streets, darkened by projecting balconies and matting canopies put up for protection from the sun. Dibai, the largest, is a walled town with an estimated population of over 20,000. Sharja, the second in size, is a settlement of 3,000 to 15,000 which is unwalled but surrounded by a fringe of palm thatch, or *barasti*, huts.
342 The homes of the wealthy merchants are of
361 two stories with wide balconies and spacious inner courts, but those of the poor are usually simple one- or two-room huts of mud brick or palm thatch. The Bedouin live in the traditional black goat's hair tents of the nomadic tribes. They move about with their herds, following fresh pastures in the winter and congregating around desert wells in the
361 summer. A few join the fishing or the pearl-
228 ing fleets during the summer season, while their families camp in the vicinity of the towns.

144 The nutritional habits of the people vary
571 with the racial, the social and the economic backgrounds of the diverse communities. Poverty and lack of adequate transportation facilities restrict the foodstuffs available to a large percentage of the population.
262 Dates, breads prepared from wheat or mil-

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63:Simmons et al G-8 (1941-1951) 1954
M1 Middle East
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let, and milk are staple articles of diet, and may be supplemented by fish, meat and vegetables, depending upon the resources of the individual families.

Although trails link the principal towns of Trucial Oman and Muscat, coastwise dhow traffic forms the chief means of communication. Steamers from Indian to Persian Gulf ports call irregularly at Dibai and Sharja. A flying boat station and an airport are located at Dibai and Sharja, respectively, and are used occasionally by commercial airlines.

ENVIRONMENT AND SANITATION

Water is scarce throughout most of this region. Supplies for domestic and irrigation purposes are obtained from springs, wells and rain-water cisterns, but underground sources are unreliable, except in limited areas north of Dibai. Artesian waters are found chiefly in the vicinity of Sharja. The western part of the territory is particularly arid: water for Abu Dhabi is transported by boat from Dibai.

The standards of sanitation are generally low. The methods of sewage disposal are primitive, and, although latrines are employed in the towns, indiscriminate pollution of the soil is a widespread practice.

The insects and the animals of medical importance native to Trucial Oman are comparable with those encountered under similar environmental conditions along the eastern coast of Arabia. Few entomologic studies have been recorded, but *Anopheles culicifacies* is known to be present, and is regarded as the principal vector of malaria. It breeds prolifically in wells, cisterns and irrigation ditches. *A. stephensi* also has been identified at Khor al Kalba, and is probably a vector in some localities. Flies are plentiful in towns and villages, and several species undoubtedly are implicated in the transmission of intestinal and eye infections.

HEALTH SERVICES AND MEDICAL FACILITIES

Public health services are almost non-

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